

# Reason to smile

## Airman-Seabee builds bonds in Panama

by Louis A. Arana-Barradas  
photo by Master Sgt. Lono Kollars

Capt. Star Longo has reason to smile. He commands a construction crew of Navy Seabees, travels to distant lands and gets to make people happy. He did all that in the three months his team spent building a community center in tiny Llano de Piedra, Panama. The team was part of the 400-member Joint Task Force Armadillo, in the country on a U.S. Southern Command-sponsored New Horizons 2005 exercise.

"I love this work," said the Air Force civil engineer — and surfer. He "joined" the Navy on a two-year exchange program and learned how Sailors do construction.

The work in Panama turned into a labor of love when the crew befriended the people they'd come to help. Each day, the one-road town welcomed the team. Children shouted greetings in English, learned from their new American friends. Over lunches of rice and chicken — or iguana tail — the Americans and Panamanians built a strong bond.

"The people here made this the best job I've worked on," he said. ♡

**"We left a great project here. We did what Seabees do best — left quality in place. I'll leave feeling like it was a completely successful mission."**

Capt. **Star Longo**  
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Number of exchange officers: 13  
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